

GHANA



Much of the attraction of Ghana is based upon its legacy as the center of the gold, ivory, and slave trade during the 17th and 18th centuries, when the mighty Ashanti Empire held sway here. However, Ghana also possesses one of the best [game reserves](#) in West Africa, a multitude of good beaches, and plenty of hospitality.

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History

Ghana's rich history centers on the once-great Ashanti Empire, which rose to power during the late 17th century and continued to prosper as a center of the 18th century slave trade. The Ashanti capital, [Kumasi](#), was during this period one of the finest and most advanced cities in Africa, and the Ashanti state even employed significant

numbers of Europeans as advisors and administrators. The European presence in Ghana is also marked by the multitude of colonial forts that dot its coastline—strongholds that anchored the European trade in gold, ivory, and slaves. Although Ghana, then known as the Gold Coast, was largely considered a British territory by the latter half of the 19th century, it wasn't until 1900 that the British succeeded in defeating the Ashanti and the area's other strong kingdoms.

If Ghana was late in coming under European control, it was also the first African nation to win back its independence, in 1957. However, corruption and internal military strife proved to be intractable problems, and Ghana went through an extended period of instability in the 1960s and 1970s marked by military rule. The country has since been moving steadily toward political stability and economic prosperity, and seems today to possess one of the most promising futures of any of the West African nations.

The People

There are over 100 ethnic groups living in Ghana. The largest are the Akan, Moshi-Dagbani, Ewe, and Ga. The Ashanti tribe of the Akan is the largest tribe and one of the few societies in West Africa where lineage is traced through the mother and maternal ancestors. Once famous for the luxury and wealth of their rulers, they are now more well known for their craftwork such as hand-carved stools, fertility dolls, and *'kente'* cloth. *Kente* cloth is made of cotton and is woven in bright, narrow strips with complex patterns.

Family is a very strong bond in Ghana and is the primary source of identity, loyalty, and responsibility. Family obligations take precedence over pretty much everything else in life. Individuals achieve recognition and social standing through their extended family. An interesting cultural variation among the Akan, or Ashanti and Fanti people, is that affiliation within the clan is through women. Mothers have a higher status since, in their point of view, people get their blood from mothers.

It is important for Ghanaians to maintain dignity, honor, and a good reputation. The entire family shares any loss of honor, which makes the culture a collective one. In order to protect this sense of face there is a need to maintain a sense of harmony; people will act with decorum at all times to ensure they do not cause anyone embarrassment.

Ghanaian society is hierarchical. People are respected because of their age, experience, wealth and/or position. Older people are viewed as wise and are granted respect. In a group one can always see preferential treatment for the eldest member present. With respect comes responsibility and people expect the most senior person to make decisions that are in the best interest of the group.



Location & Climate

Ghana is situated in West Africa, just above the Equator. The Greenwich Meridian passes through its main industrial city, Tema. It lies between latitude four degrees 45 minutes and 11 degrees 11 minutes North and extends from Longitude one degree 14 minutes east to three degrees 17 minutes west. Ghana shares common boundaries with Togo in the east, Burkina Faso in the north and Cote d'Ivoire in the West. The Atlantic Ocean is south.

Ghana is divided into 10 administrative regions and 110 district assemblies. The Regions are: Greater Accra, Eastern, Western, Central, Volta, Brong Ahafo, Ashanti, Northern, Upper East, and Upper West.

Ghana has a tropical equatorial climate, which means that it's hot year-round with seasonal rains. In the humid southern coastal region, the rainy seasons are from April to June, and during September and October; the dry months, November to March or July and August, are easier for travelling. Throughout the year, maximum temperatures are around 30°C, dropping three or four degrees during the brief respite between rainy seasons. The humidity is constantly high, at about 80%.

In the central region, the rains are heavier and last longer. In the hotter and drier north, there is one rainy season, lasting from April to October. Midday temperatures rarely fall below 30°C, rising to 35°C and higher during December to March when the rasping harmattan wind blows in from the Sahara.

The tourist high season is from June to August, which coincides with the summer vacation in the US. The country sees few tourists from September to December.



Religion

Most of Ghana's 17 million people practice either Christianity or Islam, which are prevalent depending on the region. Christianity prospers in the south, while Islam dominates the rural north. Local religions also endure in Ghana, and are often practiced synchronically with the mainstream religions. The country's main holiday, Akwasidae, comes from the Ashanti religious calendar, and features an ornate ceremony involving the Ashanti king, known as the Asantehene.

Money

The unit of currency is the cedi (C). The best currencies to bring are US dollars, UK pounds or euros. Barclays and Standard Chartered Banks exchange cash and well-recognized brands of travelers checks without a commission. Ghana Cedi was redenominated July 2007. The new "Ghana Cedi" (GH¢) equals 10,000 old cedis. During the transition period of six months, the old cedi is known as "cedi", and the new cedi is known as "Ghana Cedi". Be aware that most Ghanaians still think in old currency. This can be very confusing (and costly). Ten thousand old cedis are habitually referred to as ten (or twenty, or thirty). This would, today, be one, two or three "new" Ghana cedis. So always think whether the quoted price makes sense before buying or agreeing on a taxi fare. If in doubt ask whether this is new cedis.

US dollars are accepted by some of the major tourist hotels but you shouldn't rely on this. As in all West African countries, **older dollar bills will be rejected** by banks and Forex bureaus. If you intend to take dollar notes make sure that they are all from the 2007 series or above. Euro in cash are the most useful currency and you will sometimes find that bars/restaurants will be willing to change them if you need Cedis outside banking hours.

Credit cards, generally only Visa and MasterCard, are accepted by major hotels and travel agencies.

Visas

Everyone except nationals of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) countries needs a visa to enter the country, which until recently could only be obtained before arriving in Ghana. Now, however, nationals of most countries can receive a tourist visa on arrival at the Kotoka airport in [Accra](#) for US\$100, though it's not a convenient option if you're arriving late at night. Visas allow a stay of 60 days and can be single or multiple entry.

Interesting Facts

Capital: Accra **Area:** 239,460 sq km **Population:** approx. 20.2 million

Language: English (official) and African languages including Akan, Moshi-Dagomba, Ewe, and Ga

Religions: Christian (63%), indigenous beliefs (21%), Muslim (16%)

Independence from United Kingdom: March 6th, 1957 (The country was formerly known as: Gold Coast). Ghana was the first of the African colonies to gain independence.

Literacy: 64.5% of adult population (over 15 years) **Est. infant mortality:** 56 per 1,000 live births **Life expectancy:** 59 (Women), 56 (Men)

GDP: \$39.4 billion, \$1,980 per capita. Services are 39% of GDP. Agriculture is 36% of GDP and industry is 25%.

Ethnic groups: Twi and Fanti-speaking Akans (44%), Mole-Dagombas (16%), Ewes (13%) others (27%).

Workforce: Basically an agricultural country. Agriculture accounts for about 45% of Gross Domestic Product and employs about 60% of the labor force.

Government: Parliamentary democracy. The Constitution of the Fourth republic was approved at a referendum held on 28th April, 1992 and came into force on 7th January, 1993. Single chamber of 200 Parliamentary members.

President: John Agyekum Kufuor (elected January, 2001)

Education: Ghana operates a 12-year pre-university education system—six years of primary followed by three years each of Junior Secondary School and Senior Secondary School. Ghana has five public universities and other private universities, eight polytechnics and 22 technical institutions.

Economy: Main exports are gold, cocoa, timber, bauxite, manganese, diamonds which are called "traditional exports," as well as horticultural products, handicrafts, processed food and manufactured goods, which are called "non-traditional exports."

Dialing Code - the international dialling code is +233.

Time – Ghana is the same as GMT.



Getting Around

By plane - There are scheduled domestic flights 2 - 3 times a day between Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi and Tamale in the north, including flights by Antrak Air. There are also flights to destinations outside the country. [CityLink](#) also flies between Accra and Kumasi, etc.

By train - There are rail links between Accra, Takoradi and Kumasi. The train is very slow and it travels at night so you won't see much, but the Ghana train system is currently undertaking rehabilitation so it will be vastly improved with new stations and faster more frequent trains.

By car - Roads are variable. In Accra most are fairly good. Significant improvements are being made on the main road between Accra and Kumasi. Most of the roads outside Accra, apart from the major ones, are dirt tracks. The road between Techiman and Bole is particularly bad and should be avoided if possible. For travel on most roads in the North of the country a 4x4 is required. A sedan or saloon car will cope with some of them in the dry season but it is not recommended. Also, cars with foreign registration are not allowed to circulate between 6PM and 6AM. Only Ghanaian-registered vehicles are allowed on the road at this time. Non-compliance can result in fines and the impounding of the vehicle for the night.

By bus - STC is the main coach company. They operate long distance domestic and international services. STC is probably the safest way to travel long distance, and is also pretty quick compared to other options, although even on STC breakdowns are reasonably frequent. STC operates between Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi, Tamale, Cape Coast, and other main cities. 'Express' or 'Air-conditioned' services are quicker and a lot

more comfortable than the ordinary services and are now available on the Accra-Kumasi, Accra-Tamale, and Accra-Bolgatanga routes. Buy your tickets a day in advance, because often times they will be full if you wait until the day of travel. Also, expect to pay for your luggage based upon its weight. It should rarely be over 1/3 the price of the ticket. Several other companies also operate bus services between the major towns; these include OSA and Kingdom Travel. Their service is marginally more reliable than *tro-tros* but there isn't much in it. MPLaza Tours also operated bus service between Accra, Kumasi, etc. What's nice about MPLaza is that it has its own gated bus terminal(s).

By Tro-Tro - A '*Tro-tro*' covers almost any sort of vehicle that has been adapted to fit in as many people, possessions, and occasionally livestock, as possible. Tro-tros are typically old, 12-passenger VW vans. Similarly to 'shared' taxis, tro-tros will run along fixed routes and have fixed fares, and will rarely run with less than capacity [so be prepared to wait]. They are inexpensive (cheaper than shared taxis and STC buses) and fares should reflect distance traveled. However, they have a questionable safety record and frequently breakdown. Breakdowns are usually not too much of a problem since they will break down in a route where other tro-tros run, so you can just grab another. Although they generally run point to point they will usually pick and drop on route if required. They make runs within the city (i.e. Circle to Osu for GH¢.20) as well as intercity routes. They are often the only option between remote towns but are not recommended for long journeys. Tro-tros are an excellent way to meet Ghanaians, and are always great for a cultural adventure. Sometimes they will make you pay extra for luggage, and occasionally they will try to overcharge, so try bargaining

By taxi - Taxis are prevalent, and they find usually find tourists quick enough if you need one. To charter a taxi is more expensive than to share one, but prices are negotiable and can be bartered over. Always settle on a fare before getting in. A taxi for a very short route should be no more than GH¢1.00, longer GH¢2.50-5.00 and GH¢7.00 should be enough for anywhere in the city. Fares continue to fluctuate with the fuel prices on the international market. About one in every 10 taxi drivers will probably try to cheat you for a higher price if you're a foreigner. In Accra and the major cities, most taxis will assume you require a charter taxi and unless you are on a very strict budget it's usually easiest to do this. In more remote areas, shared taxis are most common.

Language

Because Ghana was colonized by the British, English has become the official language, and many Ghanians (particularly in urban centres) you'll meet will be able to speak English. Official government documents are kept in English, but there over 40 distinct languages spoken in Ghana including English, [Twi](#), Ga, [Ewe](#), Dagbani, and so on. *Obruni*, the Akan word for foreigner, literally means "white man", is generally shouted to greet any tourist in an unoffensive way (sometimes). *Obruni* is used in a similar way as the word *Toubab* is used further west in Mali, Guinea, the Gambia and Senegal. Pidgin English is about the the most typical form of English you will find. With phrases like: *my*

head de bash, meaning "I have a headache". In the Northern Regions and among Ghanaian Muslims in general, the [Hausa](#) language is used as a lingua franca.

Food & Drink

Food is extremely cheap in Ghana. Traditional food is fun to try and easy to enjoy. *Fufu*, the most widely served traditional dish, consists of pounded balls of yam, plantain, or cassava served with soup, and a side of goat meat or fish. Soups are typically made of groundnuts, palm nut, okra and other vegetables. *Banku* is a fermented corn version of the dish typically eaten with grilled tilapia fish or okra soup.

Rice dishes are also typical, but not considered a "real" meal by many Ghanaians, males especially. *Jollof* rice is a dish as varied as its chef, but generally consists of white rice cooked with vegetables, meat pieces, spices in a tomato based sauce. *Waakye* is a mix of beans and rice, typically served with gari, a powder of ground cassava. Often rice dishes are served with shredded lettuce, cucumber and tomatoes on the side with a dollop of Heinz salad cream or mayonnaise. Such meals are extremely cheap from street vendors and come as little as GH¢1.50 to GH¢2.50.

Plantains, yams, and sweet potatoes are prepared in various ways and serve as small snacks. *Kelewele*, a spiced fried plantain snack, is especially delicious. Fresh fruits such as pineapple, mango, papaya, coconut, oranges, and bananas are delightful when in season and come when applicable by the bag for as little as 10 cents. A great African meal in a restaurant can cost as little as GH¢3.00 to GH¢7.00. For instance, a lobster and shrimp dinner can cost a mere GH¢6. There are also a number of Western and Chinese style restaurants available especially in Osu, a trendy suburb of Accra.

Drinking water from the tap is not generally considered to be safe, so choices include plastic bottled water (eg. Voltic, 1.5l appx. GH¢0.60), boiled or filtered tap water, and "pure water" sachets. These sachets are filtered and come in 500 ml. portions. Many foreigners prefer bottled water. Water in sealed plastic sachets is generally not considered safe. Although easily accessible and an unique experience, small studies have shown varying amounts of fecal bacteria suggestive the source may be tap water. If you want to play it safe, stick with carbonated beverages.

Safety

Ghana is currently a very safe, stable country with relatively low crime levels compared to other West African countries. Take sensible precautions but be assured it is quite safe. Bywel's bar in Osu is a frequent hangout of expats on Thursday nights, meaning that it is a target for muggings. Be sure to leave in a large group and enter a taxi immediately upon exiting the bar. Cases have also been reported of people snatching cell phones in the streets. Avoid using your cell phone out in the open if you do not absolutely need to.

Health

Be aware that chloroquine-resistant **malaria** is widespread and you must take sufficient malaria protection including mosquito avoidance, mosquito repellants, and chemical prophylaxis. Yellow fever vaccination is required for entry into the country. Hepatitis A&B, Cholera and Typhoid fever inoculation is also recommended.

Risk of **meningitis** is high in the northern third of Ghana which is a part of the meningitis belt of Africa. This applies especially during the dry windy periods from December to June. A polysaccharide vaccine is available for meningitis types A, C, Y and W135.

Although the **AIDS/HIV** rate is lower than other sub-Saharan African countries, do not have unprotected sex. Receiving a blood transfusion while in Ghana greatly increases your risk of acquiring HIV. Also you should avoid contact with still freshwater as there is a risk of **schistosomiasis**.

Some restaurants will approach European health standards, but be prepared to pay for this. Smaller restaurants, often called "chop bars," will likely not meet these standards.

Because of the tropical climate near the coast, travelers will need to stay hydrated. Bottled water is available everywhere. Volta Water has been a reliable brand, but do check to make sure the seal has not been broken.

Etiquette

Do try and pick up on respectful practice (such as not eating or offering with your left hand), but in general Ghanaians are quite accepting of tourists getting it wrong. Greetings are very important. Ghanians are not forgiving of people who do not take time to greet others. Sometimes greetings come in the form of a salute accompanied by a "good morning" or "good afternoon". The expected response is the same (a salute with a "good morning or afternoon").

Meeting Etiquette

- Traditional or native greetings vary among the various ethnic groups.
- With foreigners the most common greeting is the handshake with a smile.
- When shaking hands between themselves, Ghanaians will hold the right hand in the normal manner but will then twist and click each other's middle finger.
- Unless you are experienced it is best to stick to a normal handshake!
- Christians will generally shake hands between the sexes; practising Muslims often will not shake hands with people of the opposite sex.
- Address Ghanaians by their academic, professional, or honorific title and their surname.

- As a sign of respect, males over the age of 30 may be addressed as *pah-pah* while women of the same age may be called *mah-mee*. People over the age of 50 may be referred to as *nah-nah*.

Gift Giving Etiquette

- Gifts need not be expensive; the thought is more important than the value.
- If invited to dinner at a Ghanaian's home, you are not expected to bring a gift.
- However, a gift for the children is always a nice touch as it shows a concern for family.
- Gifts should be given using the right hand only or both hands. Never use the left hand.
- Gifts should be wrapped, although there are no cultural taboos concerning paper colour.
- Gifts are not always opened when received.

Dining Etiquette

- Ghanaians enjoy entertaining in their homes and you should accept any invitation as a sign of friendship.
- Dress well; Ghanaians place a lot of emphasis on how people dress. You may need to remove your shoes.
- Greet elders or heads of family first.
- Ghanaians table manners are relatively formal.
- Wait to be told where to sit.
- A washing basin will be brought out before the meal is served; use it to wash your hands.
- Food is generally served from a communal bowl.
- Do not begin eating until the eldest male does.
- Eat from the section of the bowl that is in front of you. Never reach across the bowl to get something from the other side.
- If you do not want to eat with your hands then ask for utensils.
- If you use your hands then scoop the food with the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand. Do not use your left hand.



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